



Eliminating Gender-based Violence Web chat on Nov. 30, 2011

Discussion Leaders:

Mona Ambegaonkar: Actor and activist

Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal & Kaizaad Kotwal: Poor-box Productions

Vandana Kripalani: Bombay Teen Challenge

Priyadarshini Ohol: Zero Tolerance Campaign

Yogesh Pawar: Sunday DNA

(Read more about the panelists at the end of the transcript)

As part of the International 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence, the American Center Mumbai organized a web-chat with thought leaders and activists on the issues of gender violence, female empowerment, the media, and digital engagement which aimed to discuss questions such as:

*How do we define the problem of gender violence?

*The Role of Entertainment and Mass Media: Creating or Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Violence?

*How can Social Media Raise Awareness, Change Perceptions, and Behavior?

Moderator 1 - American Center: The first question for our panelist and audience: How exactly should we define the problems around "gender violence?" Depending on how we define the problem, we will conclude on certain CAUSES and SOLUTIONS... what are your thoughts?

*Yogesh Pawar: Any interaction where the power dynamic is underlined in a way that it makes it clear that one person is in power and seeks to subjugate the other is 'violence'

*Priyadarshini Ohol: I'll define Gender Violence as ANY verbal/mental/physical/sexual abuse intended to cause harm or to subjugate a member of a particular gender. Women have predominantly borne the brunt of such targeted violence in patriarchal societies.

*Yogesh Pawar: Violence is not necessary physical. It can be verbal or non verbal... Sometimes a glance, a raised eye-brow is all that will be visible but the context is what makes it violent....

* Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: violence is of several types...physical, emotional, mental. it is a fallacy to think that physical violence is the worst kind.....violence is the demeaning of the spirit of a human being and manifests itself in several ways.

* Mona Ambegaonkar: It's a result as much of cultural background and upbringing as it is of straight forward bias - envy towards the 'weaker' sex - especially if they are perceived to have achieved something that may have so far been a domain of the 'stronger' sex.

* Kaizad Kotwal: Gender violence is any form of oppression/subjugation/treatment which involves the use of force (verbal/emotional/psychological/physical/institutional etc.) based on a power dynamic informed by the idea that the subjugator/perpetrator is superior to the victim/receiver.

*Yogesh Pawar: Mahabanoo is right... ultimately it seeks to crush the spirit of women

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: i think yogesh has said it beautifully!

*Yogesh Pawar: A tribal woman who is driven away without the police wanting to entertain her complaint, though her family is missing for several days, can be violence

*Mona Ambegaonkar: Not just women, even Gay and Lesbians face severe violence from almost everyone they have to interact with. They are also a 'weaker sex'.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: I concur and add transgenders to that Mona

Darshan: Mona ji how can Gays and Lesbians be determined as the "Weaker Sex". Isn't the violence against Gays and Lesbians a totally different issue, not to be confused with the Gender Violence and needs to be treated separately? As perhaps there might be different ways to handle both the issues?

*Mona Ambegaonkar: No. They face violence because their sexual choices are different and also because they dare to be open about it. If they were to hide their orientation it would be safer for them. Women face violence when they attempt to break out of the set rules assigned to them. It's the same as choosing to be different. Effeminate Gays are treated and violated much the same way as women are.

*Kaizad Kotwal: I agree with Mona -- one of the often missing pieces of the discourse on gender violence is that much of violence against women is rooted in homophobia and conversely homophobia is just another manifestation of the feminine being seen as weak/not worthy/deserving of oppression and subjugation. Homophobia and misogyny are two intrinsically social ills that emerge from the same polluted source.

*Yogesh Pawar: Mona's right... The brutal violence even rape that transsexuals or men who have sex with men have to undergo is often ridiculed... They have no redressal mechanism.... Not that women who do are facing a better fate says the cynic in me... but at least there's a formal structure in place

*Vandana Kripalani: Gender violence ultimately stems from any perceived notion of gender inequality- once an individual or group of individuals deems the other sex as inferior, violence can manifest itself in all kinds of ways.

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: Today's society tries to demean anyone who is 'different' to their way of thinking/living/doing. This too is violence. I know someone who told me that she would remove her grandchild if his/her teacher was gay. And when I questioned her about whether heterosexuals are incapable of molesting, she said "that's not possible"!! I am sure you are as stunned as I am to that reply!!

Dhruv: Shouldn't there be a focus on the labeling - that can be a source of and a reinforcer of the stereotyping, which then has the effect of keeping things from changing..

*Vandana Kripalani: Dhruv I agree that labels can be a source and reinforcer, but the labels themselves come from the way we've been socialized

*Yogesh Pawar: Dhruv... this leads down the semantic path, I'm afraid.... All one needs to do is close your eyes for a second and imagine yourself in that place... Would you allow that to happen to you? What would your reaction be like? That kind of defines and labels it like nothing can..

*Kaizad Kotwal: Yes. Labeling is key. Actually if you ask the "radical" feminists they would argue that we need to change the entire language (English here) which largely privileges the male. There are interesting exercises one can do to see exactly how we carry subtle and not so subtle biases about women (and other marginalized groups) based on our dominant language.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: And labels are nothing but names for what exists

Dhruv: i was thinking more of the example of "weaker" and "stronger" i think this too is something that should not be done - this clear separation

ramaa k: When we talk about labels... what is the role of the Media and films in this. The signals the public are given tend to reinforce these same roles, and macho behaviours.

*Kaizad Kotwal: The media's role in all this is complicated. Because I am an adamant free speech/freedom of expression proponent I would never ever say that the media should be allowed to do this or should not be allowed to do that. I say let the media do what it wants to/needs to. What we need is media literacy. If you know what the media is feeding you, with

the biases and agendas therein, then it will not affect you.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: To a layman films and media are the main source of information though, Kaizaad and hence along with freedom, I believe media should be responsible.

Mrs. Desai: how much responsibility is the media willing to take in projecting gender stereotypes?

*Yogesh Pawar: The responsibility can be as much as the surfer/ reader/ listener/viewer ultimately

ramaa k: But isnt th prblm them the "uneducated?" -- masses that are not aware that Hindi flms are fiction

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: let's not even go there ...to the media, i mean. most of our commercial bollywood films are totally regressive in their content. has any really serious film been made on aids or the social ostracisation of such individuals keeping in mind the indian context. and when they show gays, its a stereotypical characterization that hurts the cause more than it helps.

* Vandana Kripalani: Ramaa I think education can only do so much- there are several very educated families that are aware that Hindi films are fiction yet they choose to live out their bollywood inspired false sense of reality

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: people who are socially concious unfortunately are not making films or serials. its all about trps and box-office collections and the usual refrain is, 'the audiences want this'. that may be true because you have not taken the trouble to give them something better. i have come to realise this with my play, The Vagina Monologues. at first i thought i would do 5 shows and close it. but i truly underestimated my audiences, who even after 9 years, throng the theatre to see it. you give someone a good product and there's no way you can fail.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Mahabanoo is too right, artists and creators are failing the masses and doing a disservice to the nation by not using their media, reach and talent to sensitize people and depict proper attitudes.

Dhruv: But there are many different media, and the medium that is having the greatest effect is working as a reinforcer it seems - mostly tv and serials and such - what can be done to counteract this?

*Yogesh Pawar: As mediaperson I know that not all that is being perpetuated about women and their image is not desirable... While I firmly believe that there shouldn't be any moral stands... I remember Meenal Bahgel saying this at her recent book launch about how women are being pushed from the patrilineal exploitative paradigm to another one where "they feel compelled to sleep around" to look cool and with it.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: Yes Yogesh, thats true. women are being encouraged to be promiscuous. But no one is going to bring them to a 'respectable' proposal voluntarily.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: The media thrives on making the woman an object of lust. Indian cinema certainly does. the intelligent woman who does not need to use her body to achieve her career goals is a myth on our screens. and no one, specially not the women who play these roles have any problems with that. So if the people who are facing the violence, whatever its form dont have any issues with the media which helps to propagate it, then what can one say?

*Kaizad Kotwal: Education is the key to combatting the media - not censorship, not creating more rules and regulations. If the public is media literate then the media's power in being a force for evil is highly dilluted. So for example, if you know that General Electric in the U.S. owns NBC news and that General Electric also makes engines for U.S. Military planes, then you will see the coverage of NBC vis a vis war in a more critical manner. Sadly media literacy is either on the decline or non-existant in India and most of the world.

*Vandana Kripalani: Our education system needs to change- when we talk about reforms, it is easy to say that education will help, but the kind of education we receive in schools here does not work to counteract the inequalities many believe in

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: its our educational system that has totally failed us, Vandana. more so because the system is set up by the largest no. of illiterates in parliament!!

*Yogesh Pawar: People condemn the media but how is that shown on crime in regional tv channels which have some of the worst language and imagery as far as women go enjoy such wide viewership?

Mrs. Desai: thank you yogesh, i agree that somewhere there is a demand to what is being projected, but what about the long term impact of making a woman/man an object of desire?

*Yogesh Pawar: Yes you are right Mrs Desai... there are these two ends of the exploitative continuum... One hand the woman is reified (objectified) like you say and on the other they are deified (Ma, Devi and what not!) both are equally exploitative and need to be discouraged strongly... Since they create boxes and ask women to fit in to suit the male need of a context that suits the male...

Shoba Sriaiyer: It is about Socialisation - what boys are taught at home...they have to be taught that violence against women is not a good thing; that women have to be treated with respect.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: True Shoba. I believe that mothers actually teach their sons that they and their fathers are superior to herself and her daughters. It's her way of ensuring that she keeps her bread-winner happy.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: So true Shoba, sometimes women are women's fiercest enemies, as evidenced by the statistics related to female infanticides. Most sex related abortions or child murders are done by women! Women have the responsibility to raise good men!

*Kaizad Kotwal: I agree completely Shoba. Socialization is the root of much of this. But not just the socialization of boys (which is a huge problem). Even the way we socialize girls is hugely problematic. One of the things that needs to be said here that GENDER is merely a construct (it is not natural, it is not biological, it is not inherent). Societies construct gender roles/rules to suit their needs and then pretend that this is nature's doing. This is rubbish. As soon as we understand that ALL gender is constructed then we can start to DE-construct all the madness that emerges from those constructs.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Women also have the responsibility to raise women /girls to not succumb to the patriarchal systems so entrenched in the world.

* Vandana Kripalani: Completely agree with you Kaizad- gender is a construct created by US!

*Mona Ambegaonkar: I agree with Kaizad completely. the roles that define women and men are imposed upon them externally. inherent capabilities are overlooked just because a man is supposed to be like this only or a woman is supposed to be like that only..!

Shoba Sriaiyer: @Mona Ambegaonkar, you are right...any woman who dares to be herself, or an effeminate guy is easy prey...as if a woman should not enjoy her sensuality.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: She should, as should all men and women, no matter their orientation. But above all else let's maintain decorum and mutual respect for each other's choices. Let's not forget to be courteous, even to those who we may not agree with.

Dhruv: Shoba I agree - would be good to get some examples of counteraction of such socializing

*Yogesh Pawar: Socialisation of girls is more important than boys like Kaizad says... We need to tell them from an early age that victimhood is highly overrated and they should assert themselves and nip it in the bud

Shoba Sriaiyer: But, Priyadarshini, even there the women are forced to abort their child...out of fear for getting burnt or violated by in-laws, they give in...and once they do it, get used to having an abortion...the first time is the most difficult.

* Priyadarshini Ohol: This is true in a percentage of the cases Shoba. We need to educate with reward and punish and deglamorize these attitudes through all means possible. Deep rooted social ideas are always iterative.

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: a lot of violence is perpetuated because men as very young boys are told it's a sissy who cries, they are not allowed to show their sorrow, their grief openly and all these pent up emotions blow up in terrible ways when they grow up. and ofcourse the wife/girlfriend and sometimes even the mother and sister are at the receiving end.

*Vandana Kripalani: so then media can change these ideas of socialization.. if we were to see Abhishek Bachhan as a stay at home dad and Aishwarya Rai as a business executive, wouldn't this influence our mindsets?

*Mona Ambegaonkar: The rule that makes it a crime to abort female fetuses should be implemented ruthlessly and instantly. The law provides protection to the female child. The people at home have to turn to it in large enough numbers to make it strong.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Shoba that is also one of the reasons why we at the Zero Tolerance Campaign want the state to adopt a Zero Tolerance Policy in lawmaking as well as enforcement and awareness.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Well Shoba you can counteract socialization by not accepting traditionally accepted stereotypes about men and women. So it is not true that men are better at fighting wars because they are tougher and that women would cave during war situations. I know many women who would do far better in the trenches of war that I ever could or would. Or the idea that women are inherently nurturing and men are not. Start to challenge all these stereotypes and you will start to change the socialization.

Waridhi Joshi: Mostly it is the doctor who gets punished never the mother but in reality the whole family is responsible in some way or another

* Vandana Kripalani: The doctor is the most educated in this lot, the doctor is the one who should be held responsible because the doctor is the one allowing it.. If the doctor was to in some way provide input and explain to the family the sex of the child does not matter, perhaps that is one way of educating

Waridhi Joshi: thanks vandanaji but in haryana people come home for abortion on a phone call it is highly organized

* Vandana Kripalani: Of course, the more traditional the society, the easier it is to acquire as the doctors are aware their services are in great demand. But these same doctors have a responsibility to the society- since abortions are anyway very hush hush, these doctors are probably the only individuals outside the family who are aware of the situation, adding even more responsibility to their shoulders.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Yes, Kaizad, I do counter it every day...and so does my husband, and we contribute in the ways we can...I support this cause vocally, in action and monetarily. Yet, there has to be more done to teach boys how to be kind to women, to DO housework because it is their home too, so the woman gets her rest and recreation as well.

*Kaizad Kotwal: I agree Shoba - but by teaching your son to do house work and by asking your daughter to change the punctured tire on the car you ARE challenging gender constructs and gender socialization. I think all boys must be given dolls to play with and all girls should be given lego sets to construct things with. You know it is a well known fact that when a certain Barbie came out in the US in the 1960s shortly thereafter women's enrollment and performance in math-based subjects declined all the way through college and post-graduate work. And do you know why? This Barbie, when a button was pushed on her, said "I HATE MATH!" Or that in Haiti and Jamiaca, anorexia amongst girls (unheard of there hitherto) went through the roof shortly after American television (and its ads) had made an entry into those markets.

Dhruv: but Kaizad, isn't it that if you say boys must be given dolls and girls must play with lego sets that you are thinking these things are for a specific sex? Many of the top designers in the country are men and I don't think they are all gay. the fact is we are all humans.

* Kaizad Kotwal: Yes Dhruv. But what I am addressing is that because traditionally we have said that girls must play with dolls and boys must play with mechanical things that I am saying let us give them both all these options and what we will realize is that there are no real differences in performance or preferences.

Dhruv: We should not forget the fathers of these children, both boys and girls, they are also responsible for how they are socialized - that is the best example of a strong father

Mona Ambegaonkar: Dhruv, I am glad you have brought up the issue of the father being as responsible for the children and their socialization as the mother. Dads, at least in India don't participate that much in the day to day upbringing of their children. They are not expected to. After all, it is said, the poor fellow must be so tired after a full day of work at the office or

wherever... the same of course, does not apply to the mother. Sometimes, I wonder, is she taking the easy way out because she is so tired? She should insist on the father shouldering the responsibility of their children equally.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Mahabanoo, you are right - men have to be allowed to show their feelings openly as well, so they can also live full emotional lives; when, that is not frowned upon, their softer sides will emerge, kindness will flow without embarrassment.

* Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: yes, but this will take time and a lot of effort and change in our mindsets, shobha.

Mrs. Desai: i am aware that there are some great laws in india with reference to women rights, but its awareness is the greatest problem. what would any of you suggest as a means of educating the civil society on legal rights? how can one reach out to the masses?

* Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: there are many organizations that make a concerted effort to let us know our rights. one such is The Lawyers Collective started by indira jaisingh. they have several books/brochures/pamphlets. i was amazed to read these as i was totally unaware of women's rights vis-a-vis society/family/police/courts. this organisation helps women from the lower economic and educational strata to understand these rights. they hold meetings, etc and just being able to talk is a big help to these women. if each one of us took the trouble to inform our househelp or a family member, it would truly ease the situation.

Darshana Dave: Like someone said that it's when we start raising our sons more like our daughters that it best balances raising our daughters more like our sons.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Darshana, that is a good one. Wish there was a Like button here...he he Darshana Dave': Thank you. Not my original quote, of course. It ties in with what Kaizad is saying about challenging the gender constructs.

ramaa k: I have followed Zero Tolerance on FB. Someone is there who can comment on what you are practically doing to see justice for those defend women?

* Priyadarshini Ohol: Ramaa do you mean what we are doing? Would you be able to please rephrase the question?

Shoba Sriaiyer: Tell us more about the 0 Tolerance campaign, Priyadarshini

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Dear Shoba, Zero Tolerance is a Campaign against Sexual Harassment . We focus on government and policy reforms and so one of the main things we did was to petition the government to strengthen section 354 and even 509 with safegaurds against misuse. We want Sexual harassment to be an offense against the state, not just a personal offense.

<http://www.facebook.com/zerotolerancecampaign> is our facebook page.

Zero Tolerance Campaign also attempts to engage with various fora involved in the women's rights domain and raise awareness

Shoba Sriaiyer: I signed up for ZeroTolCampaign!

* Priyadarshini Ohol: Good to have you onboard Shoba. We did take the petition with over a lakh signatures to the Home Minister Mr. R.R. Patil asking for the amendments to the laws and measures for the same. He's assured us that he's approached the centre on the issue and steps will be taken.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Kaizad, interesting data. We have to learn to take each person for what they are. I was happy to note that now in Kendriya Vidyalaya Thiruvananthapuram they teach girls electrical work, carpentry work if they choose to over cooking, stitching etc.

* Kaizad Kotwal: Exactly Shoba -- do you know that in the US for many, many years women were kept out of the armed services. Then they were allowed but only in support roles off the combat field. Then in the first Gulf War women were allowed into the airforce. By the time the second Gulf War started, women pilots in combat missions had the same level of success (of bombing accuracy, eliminating targets etc.) as their male counterparts. So within a period of about 12 years women leveled the playing field. That is mind-boggling when you consider the

utter lost potential of women's contributions that have been left unrealized because of the gender roles and constructs we are discussing.

*Yogesh Pawar: Kaizad's right! See what's happened to our own traditional matrilineal societies like the Kolis or the Nairs... The more they interacted with the outside the world the more patrilineal or male-centered they have ended up becoming...

ramaa k: When men are killed for standing up for women... and nothing is done about it... thus we need to make sure the law and police and courts are on the side of victims and not perpetrators

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Such a horrendous episode that Ramaa! Yes police sensitization and law enforcement is definitely needed on a mass scale. The western Mumbai region police have already implemented several measures against sexual harassment and we intend to meet the Commissioner for the same across the board. Ramaa the cops and law is generally atleast in Mumbai with the victims, the problem comes in when the polity and power is involved and the only way to combat that is with power and pressure!

*Mahabano Mody Kotwal: priyadarshini...power, pressure but most importantly ACTION!!

* Priyadarshini Ohol: Yes action, but sometimes action has to be forced!

*Kaizad Kotwal: I actually disagree strongly Priyadarshini - our political and judicial system in the way they operate are not only supporters of violence against women, they are some of the main perpetrators of that violence. When a woman cannot get justice it furthers the violence against her. When a husband can pay a bribe to a police officer to file a false case against his wife, not only is the husband committing violence against the woman, so is the police and the judicial system.

* Priyadarshini Ohol: Kaizaad I'm neither condoning nor gaslighting the prevalence of negative attitudes towards women within the polity, society and investigative arms at all. That is true and can't be negated. Infact I myself have been a victim where these institutions are concerned! I was speaking specifically about Mumbai. What we don't do however is escalate issues. We women face this at a particular level, say a havaladar or a corporator and then we are scared to anything at all. There is an Inspector and if not him higher authorities and there is an MLA and an MP above a corporator. Doesn't mean a woman must walk in alone. There are Mahila Dakshata Committees which actually do help in such cases apart from the regular ones.

Another good thing is that MLA's will be raising the question in the house even at the state level and proposing amendments, this several MLA's have promised publicly.

*Yogesh Pawar: While what you are talking about is curative approach... I think the long term solution will come from the preventive and promotive approach... Women will need to get assertive... men more sensitized... This is not to say that the lawmakers and the cops should not face the music... They should of course be told that the law must prevail... but for that they will have to lose some of their own masculinist prejudices.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: MLAs and MPs are actually more frightening then the hawaladar or the corporator. My local MLA was the local gunda not more than two years ago. I don't think any woman in my neighborhood is going to him in a hurry.

Mrs. Desai: i recently heard from a trusted source that kids today are very wary of volunteerism especially with regards to women issues. What is it that we can do to encourage the teenagers today to be a responsible part of society?

*Mona Ambegaonkar: Mrs Desai, children are best led by example. I know that from the children in my own family. If you are prepared to face the consequences, no matter what they may be, but stand by the things you believe in, eventually your embarrassed teenager will see that mama is not loopy but actually has something she believes in and that something makes sense.

Mrs. Desai: thanks mona, but does that mean then that it's a dual responsibility, as a third person first involve/educate the parent and then the child?

* Mona Ambegaonkar: Of course. Our children teach us as much as we teach them. Above all they teach us to let go.. and we must let go of things that are no longer applicable...things that make no sense in this day and age...where everyone with a skill can be a bread-winner and that role does not depend upon a person's gender. At the end of the day equality is measured by money, wealth and ultimately, power.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: Education should be not just about math or science, it should be about skills that help to earn a living. Financial freedom is a great leveler and ensures greater freedom for women.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Exactly Mona - traditionally we have said that men must do the accounting, the business stuff, the financial stuff for a household. That is rubbish at so many levels. If a woman has economic independence she can often escape many of the tentacles of patriarchy. (Many, sadly not all!)

* Mona Ambegaonkar: True Kaizad. But I know many men who would rather dream away and paint or sing. Math is as much a horror story for them as it is for many women..!

*Yogesh Pawar: Mona I know this from personal experience, when I want to help out with my li'l daughter Tanvi my wife's ok with it... that is till when either my wife's or my parents are around... "Tumhi asu dya," I am told, "what will they say. My mother-in-law once gave her my wife a earful whe she saw me changing a nappy. So the socialisation has to work for both the boy and the girl... I don't want Tanvi to face this when she grows up...

*Mona Ambegaonkar: The stay home dad would haev it very tough in India I believe. Specially if he CHOSE to be a stay home dad. Everyone would think he is a loser and that soemthing is wrong with him..! But such a man would have my respect.

*Vandana Kripalani: and my respect too, Mona!

*Kaizad Kotwal: Actually even in the west stay at home dads are increasing in numbers but not in respect necessarily. But here is the reality - women are outeducating men and outperforming men in many fields. In many cases they have started to outearn men. So the only option will be for more women to go to work and for more men to stay at home.

*Vandana Kripalani: Unfortunately, many men and women do not realize and understand that there are other options

When I studied Anthropology and Sociology, I had many uncles telling me that its a waste of time, and anyway, my husband to be will be an engineer, lawyer or doctor

* Priyadarshini Ohol: I disagree with Mona and Vandana, men need to work and provide to feel masculine, in the absence of an ego rub, such a man is more harmful than help, Why is it necessary for men to start Staying at Home? He'd have my respect if he did for a year or two to start with but not forever.

* Yogesh Pawar: @Kaizad and Mona: You are both right! When I began learning classical music my Dad would feel embarrassed... My cousins and chacha from Hoshangabad actually asked yeh auraton waale shouk kyon?

*Kaizad Kotwal: Priyadrashini you are falling into the same traps of socialization that we are arguing against. Why is a man who works masculine? Not at all. Masculinity has nothing to do with whether one stays at home or goes to an office. What you may be talking about is fulfillment. But then women need to fulfill themselves as much as men.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: I am talking about fulfillment. And yes women should be able to fulfill themselves. You actually reinforced what I said with the "masculinity has nothing to with whether one stays at home" Exactly! Why do men suddenly need to stay at home for women's benefit? I'm flummoxed!

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: i totally agree with kaizaad.. there are horror stories of women being harassed by husband then the police and then the judiciary.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Our institutions (political/judicial/law enforcement) are some of the major perpetrators of violence against women especially as defined by the panelists at the start of this session.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Yes Mrs.Desai and Mona, leading by example is the best thing...whether it be to influence children or adults, orto just BE there for the women who need you.

* Mona Ambegaonkar: I would say start with those who may be in your immediate vicinity and let the circle grow.

Shoba Sriaiyer: The BEST thing my mom taught me was this - "Always have your OWN source of Income, Shoba. Even if you marry rich, keep your source of income". Like Kaizad said, financial literacy and control is a huge factor to freedom and living life as one wants to.

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: it would be wonderful to envisage a world without any boundaries, political/social/gender/race/religion.....

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: we must remove the limits we have set up in our minds regarding the 'role' of a man and a woman. Unfortunately religion has played a large part in this. And with the several religions we have here, it's not easy to let go of outdated ways of thinking. But it's funny how every religion wants the woman to be submissive.

Dhruv: interesting that point about religion Mahabanoo, I think it can depend also on how one reads the stories - some women can be viewed as very strong, and some Gods can be seen also as very effeminate...?! strange how this co-exists alongside the standard patriarchy as normal

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: but dhruv, over the eons people have always wanted their wives, daughters, girlfriends to be the weaker and more submissive of the lot.....correct me if I am wrong.

Dhruv: Kaizad that is a good point about the armed forces. It seems men are worried if women begin to work in their "traditional" areas then they will lose their worth. This gender violence can be attached to the idea of fear. This fear is the reason behind many of the horrible acts against women and people considered different.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Well said Dhruv. Actually I firmly believe that violence committed stems from the weakness/fear of the perpetrator (whether this is a man who beats his wife or a country that wrongfully invades a country). The truly strong never ever have to succumb to acting out with violence.

*Mona Ambegaonkar: I agree with Kaizad that our political and judicial system supports violence against women because it automatically supports anything that signifies power. And those who get away with violence are usually powerful.

*Kaizad Kotwal: Well said Mona! And ultimately violence is about maintaining, aggrandizing and/or sustaining the current balance of power. ALL acts of violence are about those in power seeking to stay in power.

Moderator 1 - American Center: Here's another question that we'd like our panelists to take up -- given the role of education and awareness, what role is there for Social Media to play a constructive part in the campaign against gender violence? and what about those who don't have internet access?

*Yogesh Pawar: Digital activism I'm afraid has a very limited scope in India... 42% of India is still has no formal education, 19% has no power, fewer still have access to computers and fewer than that to the net...I think we have to use a more direct people to people contact medium... street plays, nukkad natak, songs and working with communities to see any change

*Mona Ambegaonkar: Social media has now spread to the mobile phone and everyone has one of those, even those who don't seem to have enough to eat. Social media can be very powerful and bring about change. It's doing so already. But who has the power to manipulate it will decide what sort of change is wrought. At the moment it's mostly about mindless entertainment which reinforces stereotypes. But that can change too. The Internet may not be

accessible to all but Radio still is and TV most certainly and of course, that mobile weapon - the phone..!

*Kaizad Kotwal: Social media is important but also often overrated. Social media has the tendency to make one feel as though one is "participating" that one is actually "doing" something. But that can be a false comfort. I think we need more and more people to get OUT into the world (from behind their computers and cell phones) to implement real change. Social media can be good for transmitting information and rallying people. But again social media is only as good as the people operating it/controlling it. One can just as easily spread misinformation via social media as one can spread real information. I feel like we need more real activism out in the field so to speak and less arm-chair activism (of which I too am guilty) from behind the safety of our computer digital screens.

Shoba Sriaiyer: Social media can get the IDEAS out into the world LOUD and CLEAR; when someone dares to vocalise it or write about it, there is legitimacy; of course, action has to follow.

Darshana Dave': Kaizad, I agree with your statement about social media and the false sense of 'participating' in a movement, simply by 'liking' it on facebook or 'retweeting' it on twitter.

Participation needs to go beyond the social media into the social construct.

* Kaizad Kotwal: Bravo Darshana! I think we need to be as critical of social media as we are of the other media. When I spoke of media literacy earlier I was also including literacy about the costs/benefits of social media.

*Vandana Kripalani: Mona is right- social media might not be accessible to all via computers, but almost everyone in India has a cell phone. Mass text messages are sent everyday marketing something or the other. What about messages to discourage gender violence?

Dhruv: Vandana the top use for mobiles is in fact radio - perhaps production of less gender constructing/reinforcing songs is the way to go -

* Vandana Kripalani: Exactly Dhruv! There are many ways to deconstruct these gender stereotypes through social media, but ultimately, even after these songs and texts, it will take a lot of face to face activism to change the way people think. Songs would be a great place to start, but they need to understand what it is they are doing wrong in order for them to make a permanent change.

Mrs. Desai: Recently I heard a friend say - it takes a woman so many years to make her own identity, and it takes just one thing to destroy it-marriage... lol! jokes apart, my question here is to the men, why is it so difficult for even an educated civilised man to accept his wife as she is (independent and a thinker), and not try to change her beliefs to match his?

Snehal Odedara: Hello all friends and thank u so much to American Centre for organise such a great event...i like ur dis work very much. According to me,if we want to stop dis BAD activity ,we need to organise such Events by which Experts motivates men and women about relationships and also explain them tat how the violence is affect to their children.

*** Moderator 1 - American Center: Thanks Snehal! Great to have you participate. What do you feel we can do to eliminate Gender Violence?**

* Yogesh Pawar: this endeavour, if one might call it that... is an ongoing thing.... negative reinforcement of the wrong and the positive of the right.... sensitisation and awareness and repeating this message continuously

* Priyadarshini Ohol: Exactly Yogesh I agree

Shoba Sriaiyer: I agree Yogesh; we have to be ready to repeat the message...tirelessly, every time a wrong has to be righted, or some woman needs support.

* Yogesh Pawar: @Shobha: The onus is on us.. we owe it to ourselves and our daughters

Snehal Odedara: that i already explain :)

*** Moderator 1 - American Center: Interesting point... and do you have any questions for our panelists?**

Snehal Odedara: yes i have

*** Moderator 1 - American Center: Do ask :) We have a great team of panelists here -- Mona Ambegaonkar, Kaizad Kotwal, Mahabano Mody Kotwal, Vandana Kripalani, Priyadarshini Ohol and Yogesh Pawar!**

Darshana Dave: A big part in eliminating gender violence is starting at the grassroots level - where we raise the next generation of boys and girls as equals and stress that the real show of strength is not in attacking the opposite sex, but in supporting them.

Mrs. Desai: recently i heard a friend say - it takes a woman so many years to make her own identity, and it takes just one thing to destroy it-marriage... lol! jokes apart, my question here is to the men, why is it so difficult for even an educated civilised man to accept his wife as she is (independent and a thinker), and not try to change her beliefs to match his?

** Yogesh Pawar: Hmmm... I cannot but agree more... But it still feel terrible that the missus wants to change the way I hold my fork and spoon for the past six years! ;D*

Mrs. Desai: Yogesh - :). changing the way you hold your fork and spoon is thankfully not changing an ideological belief.

** Yogesh Pawar: I agree.... but it has often been a source of argument...;) Particularlry when I'm eager to begin wolfing down a fav dish...*

Snehal Odedara: My question is that why our nation cannot take any action Stronglly against gender viloence??

** Priyadarshini Ohol: Snehal but we can! Start with calling a spade a spade and being aware and making people aware. It's a multi-pronged approach. Feed your local police station and ngo's phone numbers into your cell and start reporting, support policy changes, take initiatives to conduct educational gender sensitization modules. The issue is India has many many problems to solve! But If we target gender violence, take and demand action and enforcement, over a period of time we can solve this issue. Infact a Zero Tolerance National Policy towards gender violence would be great!*

Snehal Odedara: Dear Priyadarshini mam, I'm agree with u totally but our generetion are afraid to do this work

** Priyadarshini Ohol: Do what you can from where you are with what you have.*

Darshana Dave: IMO, men don't need to be less masculine and women less feminine in order for change in attitudes to occur. We just need to educate each other to appreciate, support and truly understand masculinity and femininity.

** Kaizad Kotwal: Well but if you understand what I do that masculinity and femininity are merely constructs then all this disappears. It doesn't remain important to label sewing feminine (whether a man or woman does it) and it doesn't remain relevant to label wrestling masculine (even if women do it.) here I am with the Radical feminists - we need to uproot the entire damn system and start afresh! (Easier said than done!)*

Darshana Dave: Agreed, Kaizad!!! In the meantime, while working with the system and with those labels, at least let's use education to make sure we understand each other. Of course, this needs to be on a larger social scale that is accessible to all.

** Kaizad Kotwal: Well said Darshana!*

**Mona Ambegaonkar: Thank you very much for interacting with me here. I have to go now because duty beckons as do other commitments. Best wishes to all.*

Mrs. Desai: all you guys are just super! thank you for being so supportive. i enjoyed myself. and thank you to the American center for this interesting exchange of ideas... loved it! i surely look forward to more meaningful discussions like these.

***Moderator 1 - American Center: We're nearing the end now... does anyone have a few quick questions? We have our wonderful panelists -- Mona Ambegaonkar, Vandana Kripalani,**

Priyadarshini Ohol, Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal, Kaizad Kotwal and Yogesh Pawar -- standing by to answer the last few questions!

Snehal Odedara: In our India, Most women are blindly follows things which are happening into the Serials..so if we want to spread message of Eliminating Gender Violence then we can do this Nice work By the Media. So message is spread into every home and Really people can follow it into their lives. It's little FUNNY but It is an easy way. :)

* Yogesh Pawar: I agree that the saas-bahu serials have managed to take us back by 50 years and more... Grrrrrrrr!

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: Snehal, has our nation taken any strong action against anything that benefits the 'aam juntaa'.....that's why I am totally for zero tolerance

Dhruv: thanks to all, i am going to sit with my sons now, a good future for women is a good future for men, period. thanks! :)

*Kaizad Kotwal: Yes Dhruv - you have hit the nail on the head. What men need to understand that violence against women ultimately affects them (males) - and that in fact the more secure women are, the more safe women are, the better off women are, the more independent women are the better chance the species has of survival.

Shruti Parija: I have a question pertaining to the use of awareness on gender awareness in slum communities and its effectiveness? Isn't it futile given the habituation over decades and the lack of minimal necessities?

*Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: Shruti, we have to make a start somewhere!

*Vandana Kripalani: Shruti, I don't think it is futile at all. In fact, deconstructing these gender stereotypes in slum communities could uplift many women who are entrenched in the very stereotypes that keep them there!

Shoba Sriaiyer: Bravo, Priyadarshini. Hope to meet you some time soon.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Thank you Ms. Shoba. I hope we do too. Thanks to my fellow panelists for their time and contributions, I'm enlightened in various aspects I was ignorant of.

Shruti Parija: How effective is social media in eliminating gender differences in slum communities?

*Priyadarshini Ohol: Shruti, social media is a tool for sharing information and convening, slums and rural india needs mainstream media at this stage

Shoba Sriaiyer: Nice meeting you all...good night.

*Priyadarshini Ohol: On behalf of Zero Tolerance Campaign, I thank you all for your participation and keen interest. It's been a pleasure. Do join

<http://www.facebook.com/zerotolerancecampaign>. If you have any suggestions or queries or resources to share, find me on facebook or email ohol.priya@gmail.com

tarun: Hello

*** Moderator 1 - American Center: Hi Tarun! We're wrapping up now, do you have any quick comments on this issue?**

*Yogesh Pawar: A Gulzar couplet comes to mind: Auron ne hi bheencha mujhko, auron ne hi kaata mujhko/ Ek dafa toh apna jeevan mujhko khud hi boney do/ likh lene do apni kismat, hota hai jo, hone do/ dukh ke daaney, sukh ke moti, sab hai meri aankhon mein/ abb ki baar toh mujhko apna aanchal bhar ke rone do

Darshana Dave: Thanks to all the panelists and participants. This was a Wednesday well spent.

*Vandana Kripalani: This has been a very interesting and encouraging discussion- thank you everyone. All the best

Snehal Odedara: Thank you all for participating in this great event and share ur views..thanks a lot to American Center again :) Good night to u all :)

Shruti Parija: Thank you for your comments. Am sorry for coming in late.Hope to discuss on this issue in detail some other time.

Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal: goodnight all of you....be safe wherever you are!!

Shruti Parija: Great initiative :)

Darshana Dave': Thanks, Kaizad. And thank your for sharing your views!

tarun: need neccesary actions to eliminate violence

Kaizad Kotwal: Thanks to all for a wonderfully stimulating session! Much work to be done! Of we all go out in the world to make that change! Hopefully!

Moderator 1 - American Center: It's been a great evening! Thank you to everyone who asked questions and gave their comments. If you have more opinions on the issue of gender violence, do log in to our Facebook page -- www.facebook.com/amcentermumbai -- and drop your comments there.

Darshana Dave': Thank you, American Center and the moderators.

Snehal Odedara: ok thank you mam i do what i can for sure..thank you mam and Good Night

tarun: first we need to stop gender violence at our houses

Moderator 1 - American Center: A special thank you to all our wonderful panelists -- Mona Ambegaonkar, Vandana Kripalani, Priyadarshini Ohol, Mahabanoo Mody Kotwal, Kaizad Kotwal and Yogesh Pawar -- for taking the time out this evening and engaging with our audience!

tarun: Goodnight

Panelists

Mona Ambegaonkar:

I was on the journey to being a Director before I became a model and eventually a full-time Actress. I have produced and written and directed a four part series on polyandry practiced by people in the Jaunsar-Bawar area of Uttaranchal. I am on stage with my various plays as often as I can manage it. Presently, I essay the role of a powerful and corrupt Hariyanvi politician who is also strangely progressive and liberated in a daily-soap series titled Maryada.

I have always been a vocal advocate of rights for women and girl-children and have striven to play parts on screen that illustrate progressive women with modern ideas. In my personal life too, I live the life I believe in.

Instances of violence against women and girl-children have increased remarkably in recent times. I have seen a visible change in the attitude towards women on the streets since my days as a girl going to school and college. The roughness and overt violence that prevails now did not exist in such a large measure earlier.

With women securing some measure of equality in the work arena and educational institutions, there is also a noticeable increase in discourtesy and downright rudeness as well as mental and many times, physical violence towards them.

Women may have acquired a certain freedom in what they may wear and where they may go and at what time of the day, but this is mostly applicable only in large Metros like Mumbai.

In the Movies and Ad-Media, woman as still primarily a source of titillation and little else. Intelligent roles for women in films and television are few and far between but the lure of lucre is such that more and more of them are willing to don these parts and make the money, which they hope will bring them power and make them immune to the violence that is spreading steadily.

With progressive change a certain religious regressiveness has also come into being which specifically targets women who may have embraced this change. This is to be addressed, even fought, before it becomes overwhelming.

Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal:

Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal has a B.Sc degree in Microbiology & Geology from St. Xavier's college, Mumbai. She has just returned from a Summer Directing Course at Yale University (USA) and is an actor, director and producer in film, television, theatre and radio with over 60 credits to her name in India and abroad. The owner/proprietor/artistic director of Poor – Box Productions, one of India's premiere theatre companies established in 1996, Mahabanoo has produced some of India's most critically acclaimed works and longest-running shows in English and Hindi. She produced and created V-Day India- a series of events and campaigns which created awareness and raised funds for combating violence against women. She is one of the Brand Ambassadors for Breakthrough Foundation's BELL BAJAO campaign and an active volunteer with The Women's Collective in Mumbai. Mahabanoo is also the Founder of the Make-A –Difference Foundation which raises funds and awareness to combat violence against women and children. Mahabanoo was chosen by Femina Magazine as one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in India in 2007. Human rights activist and author Zerbanoo Gifford, in her recently released book Confessions to a Serial Womaniser - Secrets of the World's Inspirational Women, has featured Mahabanoo as one of the 200 Most Inspirational Women in the World. Two weeks ago Mahabanoo received the Karmaveer Puraskar for her work towards social justice for women and children.

Kaizad Kotwal:

Kaizad Kotwal is an Emmy Award-winning art director from the U.S. Kaizad is an actor, director, producer and designer with over 160 productions to his credit in India, the U.S. and elsewhere. He had a supporting role across Michael Douglas and Topher Grace in the multiple Oscar-winning film Traffic directed by Steven Soderbergh. He is professor of theatre, film and media studies at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. He is the co-founder of Poor-Box Productions and has worked extensively on measures to raise awareness and combat violence against women and children through their smash-hit play The Vagina Monologues and the V-Day Movement.

Vandana Kripalani:

A sociology and anthropology graduate of Franklin & Marshall college, Vandana Kripalani spent six months between rural West Bengal and the Amish community of Pennsylvania, uncovering the socioeconomic factors and cross cultural influences traditional art forms have had on the women of these regions. A past participant of the Women and Work Conference of East Coast Colleges in the United States, Vandana is also an active supporter of social issues across India through organizations such as Bombay Teen Challenge and the Stop Sexual Slavery campaign- both of which work to abolish human trafficking and rehabilitate its' victims.

Currently, Vandana works as co-founder and Managing Director of Azaria International, a market entry consultancy that assists foreign companies who wish to enter India.

Priyadarshini Ohol:

Priyadarshini Ohol is a Mechanical Engineer from VJTI and works as an Internet Product Manager. An idealist who gravitated towards social justice activism, you have most recently heard of her as part of the India Against Corruption and Zero Tolerance campaigns. She aims to marry technology management and activism into bringing positive change solutions. In her free time, she writes poetry, travels and runs the Bombay Book Club.

Gender Violence is any verbal, mental, physical, sexual abuse intended to cause harm to a member of a particular gender. Women have predominantly borne the brunt of such targeted violence in patriarchal societies. The Zero Tolerance Campaign focuses on the rampant Sexual Harassment prevalent in India.

We mask this epidemic by words like "Eve-Teasing" which Mass Media needs to realise and stop using. Social media is an effective tool for dialogue, information, and convening masses of like minded people, if correctly used.

<http://www.facebook.com/zerotolerancecampaign>

Yogesh Pawar:

A social work post graduate from TISS, I have been a journalist for the past 16 years. A large part of my reporting looks at victimisation, caste issues, displacement, hunger and poverty. In a society which still largely follows a patrilineal set-up women end up becoming the marginalised among the marginalised and hence suffer some of the worst violence. The horror ends up getting magnified manifold since they are conditioned into thinking they can't and shouldn't fight back or even resist such violence. Though many believe we see are seeing a change, I believe otherwise. Paradigms are changing but the exploitative continuum remains the same.